



21 Square

20.6 sq mi, some 67,837 people, on a string of islands in the middle of the atlantic - Bermuda

October 06, 2010

Break from the traditional to succeed as a new party

In order to gain ground a new party needs to be to local politics what [Bernews](#) has been to local news, and then take it further. Bernews has accomplished what was seen as impossible, they've broken into a declining, saturated market to not only gain a foothold but a rapidly growing following. Contrast this to our opposition parties who more closely resemble the plight of the Mid Ocean News and Bermuda Network News. In order to succeed a new party needs to bring a fresh and game changing perspective that leverages their strengths and capitalizes on the incumbent's weakness.

Asked less than a year ago if there was a business to be made in local news and you likely would have been laughed at. The incumbent players held considerable market share, interest in local news was on the decline and one paper had recently folded. Despite all of this a small outlet with limited financing and even fewer resources managed to not only break into the scene, but is rapidly becoming a major player in local news and a first go to resource for many.

Rather than follow the traditional model, Bernews broke traditional rules and made its own. There's no paid subscription and no print. Articles are to the minute and breaking news is a priority over tedious articles. Through successfully leveraging a blog style website, comments and mediums like twitter and facebook, Bernews in a span of a short few months has gone from an unknown to a heavily relied upon resource. Bernews has achieved success by breaking the mould and turning traditional media on its head.

Any party wishing to succeed in local politics would benefit from a Bernews style approach. Copying legacy methods and going head to head with the incumbents at their own game is a losing battle ensuring little if any success. A new party shouldn't be encumbered by a traditional constitution, traditional party framework, the need for heavily scripted press releases, encumbering opinion pieces and traditional platforms. These are the ways of the incumbent, not the agile innovator. A Bernews approach to a new party would be fully leveraging new media, new technology and new democracy.

The incumbent, despite their success at leveraging new media simply can't be as agile and as quick as a new party could be. They're encumbered by legacy. Take their [delegate selection](#) as an example. Their constitution requires a significant turnout but given supporter apathy, they're struggling to fulfill the requirement. In today's fast and well connected age people want to be involved without having to turn out for encumbering meetings. An in person meeting isn't agile, it ties people with busy lives to a scheduled time and runs counter to the increasing trend that life is on demand rather than on schedule. A new party could be leveraging this weakness and turning it into an advantage.

A **B** **O**

Random musings on politics, finance and life on the 21 square mile string of islands often referred to as Bermuda, by Denis Pitcher.

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A new party could be agile and reactive. Supporter mobilization, feedback and voting need not take massive scheduled meetings but instead could leverage new media like a website, facebook, twitter and mobile phones. An agile organization can easily leverage these mediums to garner on-demand participation from its members. As such, the organization would be free to pursue even greater levels of participation, involving members in far more decisions than the norm. A new party need not be encumbered by traditional constitutions and platforms, requiring many levels of slow bureaucracy to affect change. Instead they can let these party instruments be living and free, open to rapid change and evolution through greater member involvement. It offers the power to break into unfulfilled niches where you could give people a taste for true bottom up participatory democracy rather than continue to subject them to our top down representational excuse for one.

A new party should be able to push out remarks and statements via all media forms rapidly and with ease, responding to and publishing statements and feedback not only from the incumbent and media but also the people. Being agile doesn't mean just being the voice of the people but instead giving the people a voice. It means leveraging technology to their advantage and bring people into the fold rather than alienate them. Make people heard, make their issues known, show that we aren't alone and that there are far more out there who share our problems and our sentiment. Leverage our voices to gain feedback, mobilize, evolve, change and flow with ease. Be quick and agile, tackle issues untraditionally and focus on small and manageable pieces, not elephant sized chunks. People shouldn't have to work on the party's schedule but instead the party should work on the people's schedule. Be agile, on demand and flexible, all the things the incumbent is less able to be.

Bernews has achieved success where others have failed because they've broken the mould. They haven't bound themselves by the traditional and instead have embraced new media, new ideas, new approaches and greater feedback to leverage it for strength rather than weakness. It is no surprise that they've achieved success and it would be no surprise if a new party also did if they followed a similar pattern. A new party needs to break the mould, embrace new media, embrace new ideas, garner feedback, be agile and bring democracy to the people, not expect the people to come to democracy. There is an opportunity to be leveraged, a niche to be exploited, a new party could succeed, if they had the right approach. They just need to recognize that they don't need to play by the rules of the old because in today's new world, the rules of success in new politics have yet to be written.

Posted by Denis on October 6, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

September 29, 2010

Treating the symptom not the cause?

Bermuda Democratic Alliance’s Deputy Leader Dr Katherine Micheltore [makes some interesting comments](#) on why people should support BDA. She opens with a metaphor of where as a Doctor she recommends lifestyle changes for people facing health risks but concludes suggesting that Bermudians should support BDA because it offers a “prescription” for a Better Way’. There’s an interesting subconscious disconnect here.

While this writer is certainly no doctor, could it be considered true that lifestyle changes tend to address the root cause of a problem while “prescriptions” can sometimes only address the symptoms rather than the underlying cause? Dr. Micheltore suggests “The reason such lifestyle messages are unpopular is because the solution rests with the individual themselves” but then turns around and doesn’t offer to empower the individual

[Robyn](#) on A foray into travel writing

[J Starling](#) on where there is no Starbucks

[Denis Pitcher](#) on where there is no Starbucks

[Lauren](#) on where there is no Starbucks

[UncleElvis](#) on Marketing essentials: Leverage the power of true fans, not strangers

[rummy](#) on Conscription, do we benefit?

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to solve their own problems but instead that the individual should be prescribed a remedy to solve their problem. It's serves as an interesting thought experiment on why she chose such words.

Is the BDA suggesting that rather than empower the people to be a part of the solution and address the root cause that they should simply accept the “prescribed” remedy? Are we likely to see a repeat of the what we’ve seen with the Progressive Labour Party’s rise to power that in the short term we’ll feel better but in the long term we’ll end up with the same problems, perhaps worse? Dr. Micheltmore wants to tell us that we should try a different way of doing things but fails to recognize that in the eyes of some the BDA has yet to offer a truly different way.

Posted by Denis on September 29, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

July 14, 2010

What's next for housing?

Between the decline in jobs and continuing growth in supply it is hard to see how the local housing market has yet reached a bottom.

In order to understand why, let's take a look at the trend and ruminate on how our current and future situation could impact housing. Let's begin with a recap of what we've written as well as what has been covered in the papers, shall we?

March 2007 - [Understanding the housing crisis](#)

We theorized the bulk of Bermuda's housing crisis could be attributed to the lack of preparation in terms of building housing for our rapidly rising numbers of guest workers.

October 2007 - [Housing by the numbers](#)

Here we looked at the approximate market shortage of supply required to compensate for the numbers of guest workers.

July 2008 - [What's ahead for Bermudian real estate?](#)

We then covered how 100% mortgages and interest only loans inflated demand and then questioned whether the term limit and other immigration policies triggered job growth to slow with more being moved off island.

August 2008 - [Is Bermuda in a housing bubble?](#)

We looked at the savings vs. loans ratios and wondered how much Bermudians had been allowed to borrow in comparison to save and what impact that would have on creating a bubble in housing.

August 2008 - [Turns in the housing market](#)

We noted the increasing signs that the market was turning, with the “executive” moniker steadily being replaced with “REDUCED”.

June 2009 - [The bubble bursting](#)

We discussed how government immigration policies, restrictions on non-Bermudians married to Bermudian home ownership and affordable housing projects could be contributing to and accelerating the decline.

Ok, now that we've covered that, let's take a look at what's been reported in the local press?

January 2008 - [Island property market is holding up says realtor](#)

Fears over an imminent US recession, a weak American dollar and the sub-prime mortgage crisis are suggested to not have significantly impacted Bermuda's housing market.

August 2008 - [Supply outstripping demand](#)

There is more supply than demand in the Bermuda's residential property market, in both the

Transportation

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Bermuda Longtail

Bermuda : on de Rock

A Radical In Bermuda

A Limey In Bermuda

F I N A

The Big Picture

Calculated Risk

C O M
E N G

xkcd - A webcomic of romance,
sarcasm, math, and language - By
Randall Munroe

K I T E

BERMUDA KITEBOARDING
ASSOCIATION

Bermuda Weather Service

Bermuda Forecast : Weather
Underground

S U B
E M A I

sales and rental sectors.

November 2008 - [Rental property inventory rises by 30% as tenants shop around](#)

Properties available for rent in Bermuda have been on the increase over the past few months, with inventory rising by about 30 percent over each of the last two years.

January 2009 - [Property inventories remain high —but no sign of housing market collapse says Coldwell Banker](#)

Realtors eager to sustain their income spin away concerns. "Bermuda has seen difficult times before, and has weathered the economic storms to hit its shores,"

June 2009 - [Island home prices drop as much as 30 percent](#)

Home owners are dropping prices as much as 30 percent to sell properties in a continuing real estate slump.

Half as many homes have sold in the past six months compared to the same period in 2008 and inventory on the Island is mounting as homes sit on the market for one to two years without buyers.

June 2009 - [Condo prices fall 11%](#)

The average price of a condominium in Bermuda has dropped by approximately 11 percent during this year as the economic downturn impacts parts of the property market.

So we're a year on and where are we now?

The [recent employment report](#) for 2009 suggests significant declines. As jobs leave the island it tends to decrease demand, as does a decrease in local employment numbers as some find themselves unable to afford homes and others find themselves underwater on their mortgages.

We're likely to continue seeing job declines in 2010 since the many office projects coming online will mean an oversupply, killing demand for construction and further reducing jobs. If as we've been suspecting our recession turns out to be primarily locally rather than globally induced we'll see continued job losses in international business until policy changes are made. These job losses will lead to less spending causing a cascading effect of further job losses in supporting industries. All of which will continue to weigh on housing demand.

We've subsequently got government rolling out and continuing to announce affordable housing projects as if housing was still trending upwards. Continued growth in supply, especially artificial growth via government sponsored projects, will accelerate the decline in home prices as people looking to unload will be less able.

Policy restrictions and taxes on non-Bermudians married to Bermudians will lend itself to decreased demand, further exacerbating the decline. Subsequently we're touting the ability for international businesses to buy up fractional ownership in our hotels and should they do so would encourage further migrations of jobs off island, decreases in demand in housing and a further cannibalization of our hotel market.

Banks exhausted the market demand during the boom with 100% and interest only loans and now that down payments are once again required the raft of people that once could have afforded mortgages no longer can do so. This will weigh on demand as will people who are seeing income declines and higher taxes in this recession.

With all of these factors in consideration it is hard to see how housing will reverse it's trend and grow at this point unless significant changes occur in our economy. If anything we'll likely see the market stagnate for a while and possibly worse (or better if you're hoping to buy or want to see declines in Bermuda's cost of living) we'll see continued declines.

Posted by Denis on July 14, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#) | [TrackBack \(0\)](#)

July 13, 2010

A foray into travel writing


A friend recently requested I throw together a piece on a recent kiteboarding trip to

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There's something about being in a different place, surrounded by an unfamiliar culture and an experience far different from the norm that makes travel so rewarding. Cabarete, a small town on the north-east coast of the Dominican Republic is one of those places. Ranked as one of the top kiteboarding destinations in the world, Cabarete has developed quite a reputation for itself among those who kiteboard or wish to learn. Even if you're not into the sport or find yourself in one of those rare occasions with no wind there are a wealth of alternative activities to keep you entertained.

As a Bermudian, Cabarete can be a uniquely rewarding experience. Your experience begins as you step off your plane to be greeted with \$10 visa tax and a complimentary shot of local rum. It can be quite surprising and gratifying to know that even should you not be able to manage a lick of Spanish the local customs agents offer no problems as they not only recognize Bermuda but also speak highly of it; at least in the couple words of English they can muster. There's nothing like having our tiny little rock recognized when most places around the world have never heard of us or confuse us for Caribbean isles. Apparently we've made quite an impression on the Dominican people as has our own local spirit. Of note, the customs officials might jokingly hint that next time would be the perfect opportunity to bring along a bottle of black seal as a gift.

[Continued here.](#)

Posted by Denis on July 13, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

July 10, 2010

Media Council Code of Practice

I've opted to voluntarily adhere to the proposed Media Council Code of Practice. I know, it'll be quite the stretch.

Though this site is an opinion only foreign hosted blog I thought it worthwhile to encourage the media and other blog sites to adhere to the standards proposed by the Media Council Code of Practice.

As a bit of a disclaimer while this site is not dedicated to encouraging discussion in the comments (there are forums for that) I have always held a policy (except for periods when I won't have internet access) that comments are not pre-moderated. However this by no means suggests that if at any time I feel managing comments are proving to be more work than they're worth I'll simply turn them off. Given my track record of attracting outstanding amounts of spam vs few actual comments I'm not terribly concerned.

If you disagree with what I have to say not only do I welcome your feedback, I wholly encourage it. I see constructive and well aimed criticism as a means to strengthen and improve my views and am rather discouraged to not receive very much of it. Mind you, this isn't to say that despite my awkward and feeble ability to accept compliments I'm not pleased to receive positive feedback, ie, it's appreciated; I just find we've already got enough people on this island with excessively inflated egos that another isn't really going to do much to help keep our island afloat.

My moderation standards will remain the same. The only comments I delete are spam

and in the rare occasions where I've felt someone has stepped over the line I've taken to moderating their comment and adding a note, usually in square brackets that I have done so.

So, I think I've blathered enough so here's a copy of the [code of practice](#) itself so you can educate yourself on how to point out the many cases where I breach it and direct me to publicly seek forgiveness.

Posted by Denis on July 10, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(0\)](#)

June 14, 2010

Marketing essentials: Leverage the power of true fans, not strangers

Marketing guru Seth Godin [summarizes it extremely well](#):

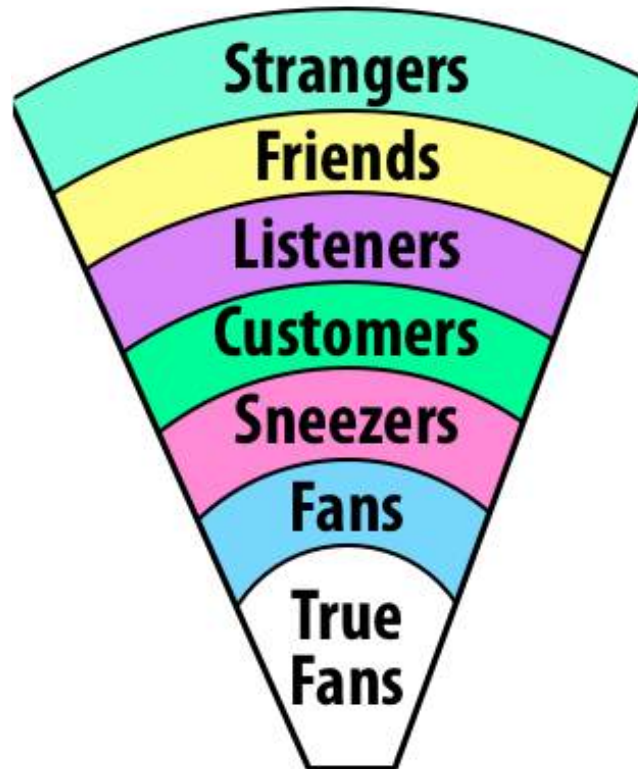
Focusing marketing efforts to win over strangers is far more expensive and less effective than leveraging your true fans.

Consider this hierarchy:

Strangers, Friends, Listeners, Customers, Sneezers, Fans and True Fans. One true fan is worth perhaps 10,000 times as much as a stranger. And yet if you're in search of strangers, odds are you're going to mistreat a true fan in order to seduce yet another stranger who probably won't reward you much.

Let's say a marketer has \$10,000 to spend. Is it better to acquire new customers at \$2,000 each (advertising is expensive) or spend \$10 a customer to absolutely delight and overwhelm 1,000 true fans?

Or consider a non-profit looking to generate more donations. Is it better to embrace the core donor base and work with them to host small parties with their friends to spread the word, or would hiring a PR firm to get a bunch of articles placed pay off more efficiently?



Bermuda is spending an absolute ton of money on PR firms, radio and billboard advertising and the like, to what avail?

How much further would our money go if we instead moved to sponsor frequent Bermuda visitors (the kind you always hear about that have been to Bermuda umpteen times) to host Bermuda themed dinner parties? Send them some genuine Bermuda merchandise, perhaps Black Seal, some Bermuda Shorts, a Bermuda cookbook, some Bermuda jams, a rum cake, a small bit of Bermuda sand, etc. Create a viral campaign out of it by creating a website for those people to submit photos of their parties for the chance to win a trip back to Bermuda.

Imagine the marketing power of empowering people who already love Bermuda, have visited many times and will rave about their experiences to all their friends vs. a billboard.

Posted by Denis on June 14, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(1\)](#)

June 10, 2010

Conscription, do we benefit?

Bermudians Against the Draft formed the same year this writer began his service. Had they entered at the same time they'd be finished now. Perhaps if a legal motion had been mounted in that time, as we completed our service, then the recent trip to the Privy Council may have been a success. Sexism could have been argued on the basis that the regiment suffers from the policy of accepting female volunteers but not conscripting. It could have been heard how conscription discourages people from volunteering post service and makes the regiment a worse place to be. It could have been demonstrated how little the regiment has really done to encourage volunteers and in the end how it drives complacency more than anything. As a young Bermudian who has finished compulsory service there is little to personally gain from still holding a position against conscription. Yet having experienced it first hand does Bermuda or the Regiment really benefit from conscription or are we instead losing out?

Sexism and the draft are controversial topics and yet rarely are they approached from the perspective of the regiment. Women in the regiment need their own barracks, their own showers, separation from the men, protection from sexual harassment and rights to fair and equal treatment and consideration. They deserve and have a right to these things. Given a full platoon of women the regiment can manage quite well, yet given a handful it does more damage than good. The issue is simple. Catering to such a small number is burdensome and taxing on the regiment. Resources that could make the regiment a better place are inefficiently allocated to cater to this imbalance. A handful of women need many special concessions and special considerations where a platoon would not. This goes far beyond the rather simplistic but valid argument that drafting only men is sexist, it establishes an element that the regiment is worse off being required to accept female volunteers but not being allowed to draft female conscripts.

Another argument is that conscription itself is damaging to the regiment. Many individuals who found themselves liking the Army elements and aspects of serving one's country were vastly turned off at the prospect of "babysitting" conscripts. Tremendous wasted effort is dedicated to dealing with people who don't want to be there and will fight the system in every way possible. Despite the perception that the regiment resolves the issues of wayward youth, for the vast majority this simple wasn't the case. Many are far too stubborn and dedicate themselves to fighting the system or resolve to gamble with being thrown in jail by never showing up. It is a misconception that the regiment has the resources or the ability resolve our social problems. Instead the whole system drives away those most eligible to rise the ranks as many learn to avoid extra service and focus on avoiding the chaos. Even individuals originally keen on the regiment burn out and leave far sooner than it would rather because it isn't worth the energy dealing with exceedingly stubborn conscripts.

Next up is the argument that the regiment doesn't do enough to attract volunteers. Somehow it is accepted that since the regiment attracts poor numbers this justifies conscription. Yet where is the clear evidence that they've made effort to attract volunteers? What innovative advertising and beneficial programs attractive to the average Bermudian have been tried to no avail? Perceptions suggest the regiment is complacent as it seems they spend more money advertising for female volunteers than

they do men. What encourages the regiment to put in the effort to attract volunteers if they'll get conscripts either way?

Things could have been done to attract volunteers that weren't. A number of startling things left this writer disappointed with the process and certainly not interested in "signing-on" for extra service post conscription. The regiment is very much an old school top-down military. All feedback has to climb the ranks and frankly goes nowhere. The only way to change the regiment is to climb the ranks, which of course changes you more than it, or [flank it](#) with international media attention. There is little wonder the organization has barely changed in 30 years.

Many see the regiment as a large waste of time. If you've spent years getting highly educated it is insulting when despite having recorded it, they make no effort to make any use of it. It can be even more frustrating when service in the regiment impedes opportunities for career advancement. Further, the perks that could be there are passed over. The once reasonable free college has been replaced by a government program. Putting in the extra time for things like the "drivers cadre" to obtain a truck license (a testing process seemingly far more stringent than TCD) gets you a flimsy paper regimental license, deceptively not valid for non-regimental vehicles. Unless you're big into the army motif there's little incentive at all to stick around unless you put in the time to become a decently paid member of one of their social or their country club. Further it's largely disappointing that the regiment has something like 200 aging paintball guns in their armory going unused. This is a perfect opportunity to create an experience that can't be had anywhere else on the island and use it to not only attract volunteers and expose people to the regiment but also perhaps tackle some growing animosity on our island. Yet why would they bother? They don't have to because there's conscription.

The Bermudians Against the Draft movement may not have been the best way to address the issue of conscription but it doesn't make the questions about conscription any less valid. Why is it reasonable that we can randomly draft some men and not others, that all men are created equal but women are not. Why do we truly think conscription is in the best interests of the regiment when it discourages people from staying on? How can we believe it is in the best interests of our island when it is a misperception that it addresses the social issues that plague many of our youth? Why do we accept that the regiment is doing everything it can to attract volunteers when there's little evidence of that fact? Is it really reasonable that it can impede those Bermuda most wants to see exceed and yet ignore simple things they could be doing today to attract more volunteers? In the end it is rather unfortunate that the regiment may well suffer in the long term under the guise of conscription being a good thing. It's a sad state to see when the regiment could have an even stronger role in making our island a better place. Perhaps one could be forgiven for believing neither Bermuda nor the Regiment greatly benefits from conscription. Even having finished his service, with nothing personally to gain from saying so, is it worthwhile to heed the words of someone who's been through it and still wonders why we're pro conscription?

Posted by Denis on June 10, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(4\)](#)

May 30, 2010

Greater transparency and community involvement

An interesting new site popped up called [OpenBermuda.com](#), dedicated to promoting open data practices at all levels in Bermuda. It goes along the lines of encouraging greater use of technology to promote better governance and open philosophies. Along that vein I'm reminded of another site, [Userve.com](#) which many top companies are beginning to use as a means to gather, organize and coordinate ideas and feedback.

I've setup Bermuda.uservice.com as a place where you can take advantage of this technology, throw up your ideas and vote for those of others. Give it a shot and while you do, think of the possibilities such technology could have if our local political parties and government embraced it as a means to better coordinate and gather feedback.

OpenBermuda.com goes along the lines of what some have been advocating for Bermuda for quite some time, namely greater transparency, openness and involvement of the people in the governance and development of our island. Quite unfortunately however, most of those presently holding political stature in Bermuda fail to really appreciate why we need greater transparency and public involvement, or if not why, fail to understand how it actually works. It's not really their fault per-se as simply many who have grown up with technology and the internet have been exposed to a whole different way of not only communicating with the world, but also thinking and approaching problems. For those to whom technology isn't second nature, appreciating an 'open' mindset and philosophy can take a bit more time.

For example, one of the criticisms against greater transparency and involvement of the common person is that things can become much harder to manage. People tend to fear the cumbersome process of trying to involve everyone in a decision, keep everyone in the loop and getting everyone on board an idea to move in a single direction. Quite unfortunately, far too often when you try to coordinate a group of people there are far too many Chiefs and not enough Indians. It can be chaotic and frustrating when you're trying to mobilize action as it takes a great deal of effort to get people all moving in the same direction without being second guessed constantly. Thus, traditionalists tend to heavily resist any movements towards such openness and transparency because they feel putting power in the hands of a crowd results in mob rule. While sometimes this can be the case, it doesn't have to be.

Modern technology is changing how we approach communication and governance. Transparency can be as simple as pre-announcing your intentions via the internet for all to see. Indeed, had Premier Brown been proactively keeping people in the loop on his plans and intentions throughout his term he may well have preempted much of the negative backlash he gets where he has to go back and explain his reasoning and decisions after the fact. It can seem like more effort to be upfront and open but in the long run it's far easier to douse wicks before they reach a bomb than try to contain the explosion after they do.

Sites and concepts like Uservice.com are the next evolution in communication and governance. They allow leaders of an organization to take what was akin to herding cats and instead produce an easily digestible source of community feedback and ideas. The concept is pretty simple, each individual is given a finite number of votes which they can allocate to an idea. They can create ideas and assign their votes to it or they can vote for the ideas of others. Ideas with the most votes get the highest priority and used in the context of customer service or community organization can produce an incredible engine for coordinating, organizing and mobilizing large groups of people. It can rather quickly gain a sense of community momentum and support for an idea and give feedback on which ones are the community's top priority.

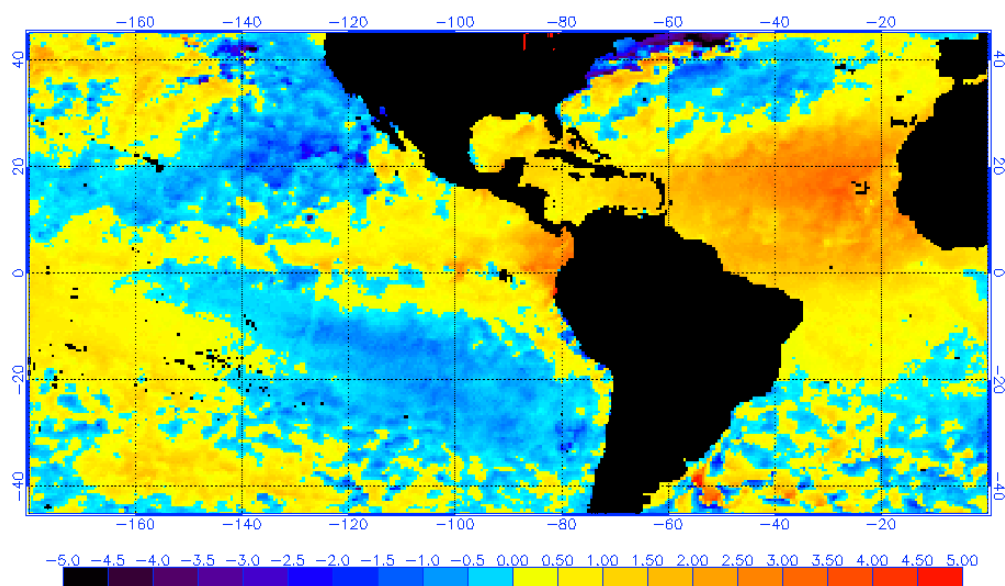
As suggested, modern technology has opened a new realm in terms of understanding and appreciating what avenues we can take to improve our governance and involve our community. OpenBermuda.com looks like an interesting attempt to mobilize greater support using technology and hopefully they'll succeed at it. Further can we be looking towards other excellent examples of modern technology out there today that we can utilize to improve our governance, gain greater feedback and provide greater involvement of the people. As suggested, bermuda.openvoice.com is already up and running, give it a shot and let's see if it can serve as a viable means of providing feedback and ideas to our community and leadership.

May 16, 2010

2010 Hurricane Outlook

So far this year we're looking at the prospect of a very active hurricane season, potentially one of the most active on record. Sea Surface Temperatures (SSTs) are so far this year at a record high with the sunspot cycle at a minimum lending itself to large hurricane favoring differences between temperatures in the upper and lower atmospheres. What will determine the scope of this year's hurricane season are how strong wind shear remains to prevent development as well as what kind of dust storms come off of Africa and how they impact the formation of low pressure storm centers.

NOAA/NESDIS SST Anomaly (degrees C), 5/13/2010



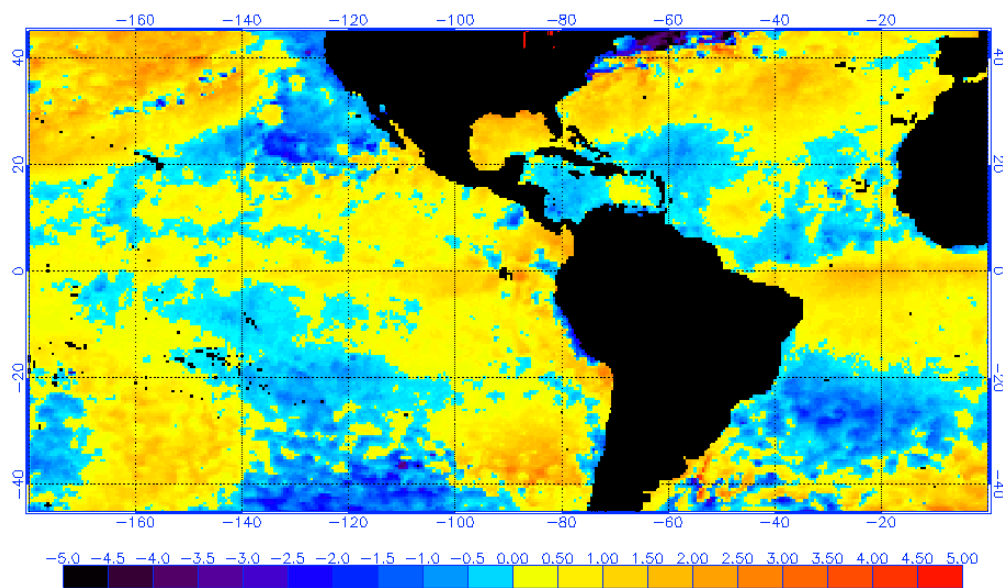
Sea surface temperature anomalies, May 2010. Image Credit: NOAA

Water temperatures in the Atlantic for the last 3 months have been the warmest on record being 1.46°C above average.

Past hurricane seasons that had high March SST anomalies include 1969 (0.90°C anomaly), 2005 (1.19°C anomaly), and 1958 (0.97°C anomaly).

These three years had 5, 7, and 5 intense hurricanes, respectively. Just two intense hurricanes occur in an average year. The total averaged activity for the three seasons was 15 named storms, 11 hurricanes, and 6 intense hurricanes (an average hurricane season has 10, 6, and 2.)

Compare the above water temperature differences from average for May 13th 2010 to those of last year on May 14th.



Sea surface temperature anomalies, May 2009. Image Credit: NOAA

We're at present witnessing a weaker Azores-Bermuda high which reduces trade winds causing "less mixing of the surface waters with cooler waters down deep, plus less evaporational cooling of the surface water."

The SSTs are already as warm as we normally see in July between Africa and the Caribbean, and we have a very July-like tropical wave approaching the Lesser Antilles Islands this weekend.

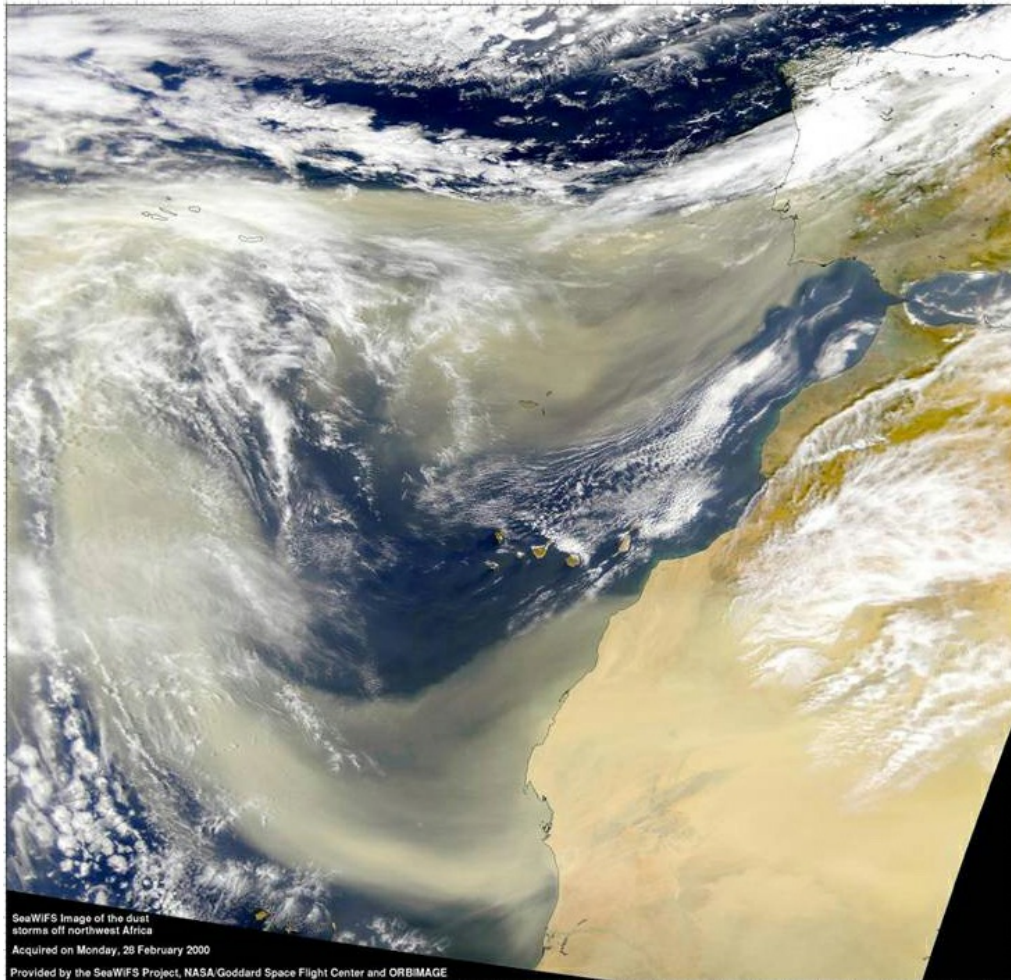
According to recent research there is a link between sunspot activity, changes in solar energy and the resulting atmospheric temperatures here on earth. During peak sunspot activity we can have slightly higher solar energy overall but significantly higher UV energy. During minimum sunspot activity we have lower energy overall a much lower UV energy. At the moment we're at the minimum of the 11 year sunspot cycle meaning we're facing an average of 10% lower UV energy. However, despite there being lower energy, this actually contributes to more hurricanes, not less.

Why we'll see more hurricanes for less solar energy comes down to basics of how weather systems work. At their most basic notion weather systems work to redistribute solar energy. The sun heats up one area causing molecules to vibrate more rapidly and air to expand. This is what creates lower density, or "low pressure". Areas with cool air remain less active and thus more dense creating "high pressure" zones. Air naturally tends to move from high pressure areas to low pressure areas which creates wind, develops clouds and can create storms.

Similarly we can also have differences between the temperatures of the upper and lower atmospheres. If temperatures closer to the surface to the surface of the earth are warmer and the upper atmosphere cooler, warm air rises. Often times it'll follow the path of least resistance and the larger the difference between the upper and lower atmospheres the more chance there is for a significant low pressure center of rising air to form to allow the warm air to rise more rapidly. Such a low pressure centers are the foundations of tropical storms and hurricanes. Less sunspots mean less UV energy which directly contributes to heating the Ozone layer. A cooler Ozone layer contributes to a greater difference in temperature and pressure between the upper and lower layers of the atmosphere, increasing the likelihood of low pressure center development.

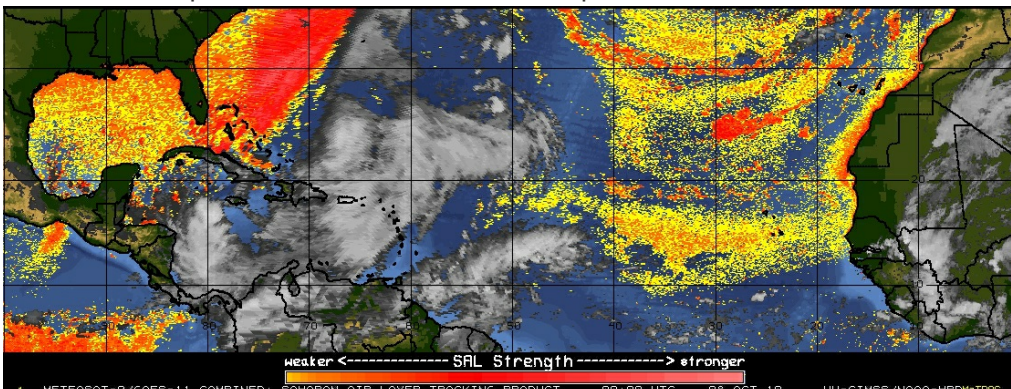
However, over the last few years research has discovered that various factors can throw a wrench into hurricane development forecasts and predictions. These primarily are wind shear and dust storms. Wind shear is caused by the difference in wind speeds and

directions at different levels of the atmosphere. Pressure differences at each level of the atmosphere develop wind similarly as they do on the surface to move pressure from high to low. This difference in the winds at different altitudes can impact the development of the low pressure center of a tropical storm or hurricane as it ends up with more resistance for air to rise effectively.



Saharan Dust, Image Credit: NASA via myweatherlady.com

Dust storms form a part of the Saharan Air Layer (SAL), a mass of dry dusty air that can blow off the Saharan Desert in Africa. Periods of high dust storms can inject warm dry in the middle levels of the atmosphere. Warm dry air sitting in the middle of the atmosphere can disrupt the flow of warm air at the surface of the earth to the cool areas in the upper atmosphere. The reason being is that the SAL creates a form of temperature inversion where warmer air is injected above cooler air that lies in the atmospheric layer immediately below. This prevents the lower air from rising ceasing the development of low pressure storm centers. What we can note in the image below is that presently the SAL is a bit on the weaker side, though the pocket of strength to the west of the Cape Verde islands shows some potential.



Saharan Air Layer, Image Credit: NOAA

Thus at present it looks like the prospect for this year is that we're facing a more active than normal hurricane season. Sea Surface Temperatures set to be extraordinarily high compounded with a low number of sunspots suggest we'll have considerably active hurricane developments this year. Only time will tell however what impact wind shear and dust storms from the Sahara will have on hurricane development as they have been known to throw off predictions and expectations in the past.

Sources:

Dr. Jeff Masters' WunderBlog

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Current Operational SST Anomaly Charts

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The Saharan Air Layer and Hurricanes

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Tropical Cyclones ... A Satellite Perspective

<http://cimss.ssec.wisc.edu/tropic2/#SPECIAL>

Posted by Denis on May 16, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(2\)](#)

May 07, 2010

Taking the high road

The Bermuda Democratic Alliance has been priding themselves on taking the high road in local politics and yet does their phrasing betray them? In their recent [press conference speech](#) on their economic platform they suggest:

The Bermuda Democratic Alliance believes there are four strategic objectives we should employ when managing Bermuda's economy:

1. Government **must** make a commitment to achieve a budget surplus over an economic cycle, and work to ensure that current account spending is less than total tax revenues.
2. Government **must** be transparent and prudent in its spending.
3. Government **must**, through legislation and policy, facilitate an environment that encourages economic activity, and a further diversification of sources of foreign cash inflows.
4. Government **must** diversify its sources of tax revenue, and distribute the burden on its citizens more fairly.

(emphasis added)

Note the use of the word "must"? It's the kind that puts people on a defensive.

Imagine you're my neighbor and I come over to tell you that you **must** clean up the stuff

you left on the sidewalk before someone trips over it and hurts themselves. Are you likely to do it? Doubtful. Even if I'm trying to help save you from a lawsuit or injuring a neighborhood child by using a forceful word like must it's like I'm ordering you to do it. You go on the defensive and despite the risks may well ignore my recommendation just in spite.

Using such a phrasing puts people on the defensive. It leads down the "our way is the only way" and "we told you so" route that has plagued the United Bermuda Party. It puts people who voted for the Progressive Labour Party on the defensive because it suggests that it is the way things have to be done in a "my way or the highway" style. People don't react well to this kind of approach.

Instead would it have been better to subtly question the PLP's ability to manage the economy without actually making it about the PLP? Thus winning more people to your point of view through strategic use of rhetoric such that people are left not only supporting your views but also agreeing with you regardless of who they typically vote for? As they say in sales, the more often you get people to say yes and agree with you the easier it is to encourage them to buy what you're selling.

Let's do a bit of revising and see how things turn out.

The Bermuda Democratic Alliance believes we need to answer four important questions if we're going to succeed in restoring our economy.

1. Can we manage to make a commitment to achieve a budget surplus over an economic cycle, and work to ensure that current account spending is less than total tax revenues?
2. Can we manage to be transparent and prudent in our spending?
3. Can we manage, through legislation and policy, to facilitate an environment that encourages economic activity, and a further diversification of sources of foreign cash inflows?
4. Can we manage to diversify its sources of tax revenue, and distribute the burden on its citizens more fairly.

Follow that up with whatever kind of Obama-like "yes we can" style dribble that The Alliance seems to like relying on and you've accomplished a few things.

Before it was attacking government. It was putting government and those who voted for them on the defensive. It was clearly defining BDA as not government and having no prospect of being government. Is that really the perception they want?

Now it's not about government and yet subtly is. It's about the people regardless of political affiliation. It's unifying phrasing and it challenges someone to ask if they can manage to do something. It's about getting every individual to ask themselves if we together can achieve these things. It's getting people to agree with you even if they don't yet support you. Every time someone agrees with you the next time it gets even easier.

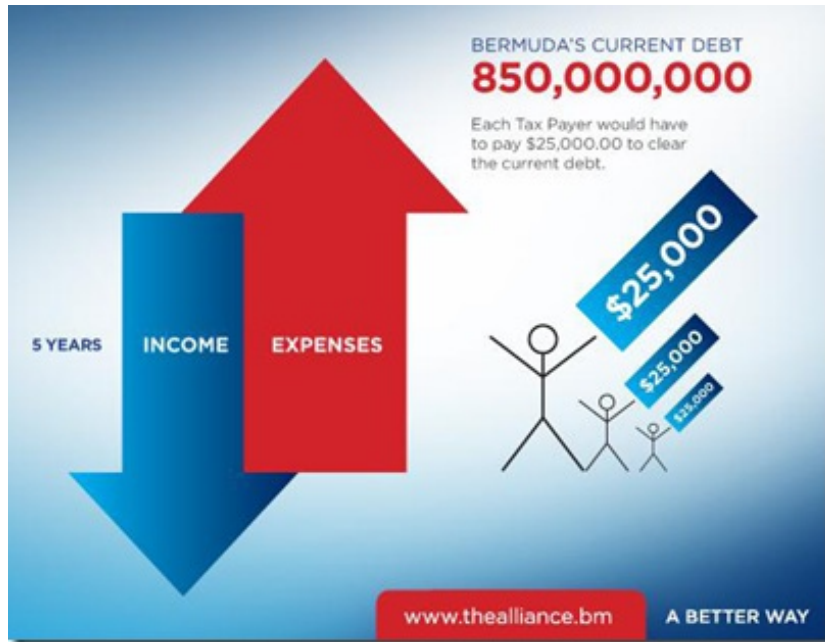
Tell someone they must and you're oppressive, ask someone if they can manage and you're challenging their self esteem and ego. The Bermuda Democratic Alliance is new to the game so we can cut them some slack. Let's remember though, they can preach all they like about their 'core values' but what really matters is managing perceptions so that those core values don't seem fake and manufactured. BDA would do well to do everything they can to emanate and truly be their core values if that's what they're going for. Taking the high road is more than just saying you're going to do it.

May 06, 2010

Getting your message across

The Bermuda Democratic Alliance released their economic platform today and while they get points for effort do they seem to miss the mark in a number of areas? Unfortunately their [actual platform document](#) (aside from the link on their website not supporting Chrome) doesn't contain the solutions they outline in their [press conference speech](#). The formatting and design of the document is quite appealing and gets off to a good start but unfortunately some of the graphics are not very clear.

Let's take the following page as an example.



The concept is a good one, show our debt and show how our government is overspending. Unfortunately the execution of it is less obvious. There is only a subtle difference in the size of the expenses arrow vs. the income arrow. Are they also trying to imply that expenses are rising and income is falling? It's not obvious. This understates the severity of the situation.

Subsequently the stick figures with \$25k listed next to them looks more like they're cheering as having received \$25k rather than what the fine print outlines that we're all about \$25k in debt.

A clearer illustration of our debt, expenses and income would have helped alongside a picture clearly depicting the severity of the burden we face. Ie, a google search for "[clipart person carrying burden](#)" reveals this image which can be purchased in multiple sizes for less than \$5.



Would it have been more illustrative to have put a big dollarsign on the box with an arrow to it outlining the \$25k of debt per person with the hill being climbed labeled as “Government overspend”.

That’s just one example of many possibilities. When trying to get a message across to people it’s important to note that you only have a matter of seconds to capture their attention. Subsequently most people don’t have the background to know what you’re trying to say. To many people \$850 million is a meaningless number. It’s big, but many don’t truly appreciate how big.

It’s important to put things into a context that people can readily appreciate. Let’s say government in 12 years in power has accumulated \$850 million in debt (not entirely sure what the actual number is). Equate that to affordable homes at \$500k apiece by taking a clipart picture of a home like [the one below](#) and put \$500k in place of the “For sale”.



dreamstime.com

Then show what \$850 million worth of affordable homes looks like by drawing out 1700 of them below the larger home image. Suggest this is how many affordable homes we could have bought with what we’ve already spent in debt and ask how many affordable homes we’ve actually gotten?

There’s value in simplifying a message so that it can be consumed as fast and as easily as possible. It means people will get it. Unfortunately if you don’t, there will be a lot of people left scratching their heads wondering what you were trying to say.

April 16, 2010

Perceptions can be deceiving

The following is an alternative version of my [thoughts on the recent term limits meeting](#) which I was considering for submission to the Bermuda Sun.

In some cases perceptions are poor; in others they're downright inaccurate. Immigration Minister Burch's meeting with Bermudians in International Business is a good example where perceptions can at times be deceiving. Work permit term limits came to being as a result of community perceptions that granting of long term residency to non-Bermudians risks adding to our social ills. 3 years in, perceptions suggest the Minister isn't interested in non-Bermudian views. Perceptions lead our guests to believe they're not welcome just like international business isn't interested in investing in Bermudians. If we learn anything from this recent meeting it is that perceptions can be misleading and we need to work hard to change perceptions if we hope to make Bermuda better.

According to the 2001 white paper on long term residency Bermudians believed granting residency to non-Bermudians would negatively impact the ability of Bermudians to own land, find good jobs and attain affordable housing. It would risk damaging our culture while potentially incurring negative social and economic costs. Years into the term limit policy and a ways since non-Bermudians were granted residency many of these things have happened anyway. Perceptions were that long term residents were the cause of these problems when in reality our perceptions have been skewed. How long should we invest in a policy that isn't achieving the goals it was set out to and may well be doing more to damage our community than better it?

While the means for garnering feedback from Bermudians in International Business may have been unsavory, does the Minister care to hear non-Bermudian opinions? Minister Burch claims he has met and worked hard with individuals and businesses to make the policy as reasonable as possible. Claims supported by Bermudians standing to say his efforts were evident. Further for a policy created to address Bermudian perceptions is there considerable value in collating the views of Bermudians closest to the policy? Are these individuals not the best resource for views on whether the term limit policy works in the best interests of Bermudians?

Perceptions have led many non-Bermudians to feel unwelcome and that the value they add and could be adding is underappreciated. We place expectations on our guests to plan their lives based upon mere months' notice on whether their contracts will be extended. Seemingly treating them like replaceable tools as a means to an end rather than as partners in helping make Bermuda better. Does this create a transient workforce discouraged from investing in Bermuda? Do far more leave voluntarily long before being term limited? Does this hurt businesses and hurt Bermuda? Not only because we discourage these individuals from becoming invested and involved in our community but also in trading the well integrated for the un-integrated. Could anything be more damaging to our culture than this?

Perceptions are that Bermudians are being short-changed. That job adverts are tailor made for non-Bermudians, that opportunities are not made available and barriers are put in place. The Minister himself contends that this is a minority occurrence, that in most cases international business companies go above and beyond expectations to ensure Bermudians are given opportunities and that companies are duly recognized and rewarded for it. That Bermudians who put in hard work and effort are usually recognized and rewarded and that companies are desperate to find capable individuals to join their team. Unfortunately we just aren't providing enough.

There's little doubt perceptions are poor and yet perceptions tend to control beliefs and override reality. There isn't clear evidence that long term residency is the cause of our social ills. Despite perceptions the Minister appears to be working hard to incorporate a variety of views and there's value in gathering Bermudian specific ones. Most welcome our guests and value their contribution but our policies and practices give different impressions. Many Bermudians believe we're being left behind and yet in many cases great efforts are being made to ensure we're not only brought along but encouraged to eventually lead the way. Perceptions are not reality. If there's any take away from this meeting it's that we need to work hard on all fronts to change perceptions if we hope to make Bermuda better.

What can we learn from term limits?

The following was [printed in today's Bermuda Sun](#) opinion section.

Controversy aside, can we learn from Immigration Minister Burch's recent meeting with Bermudians in International Business? It is suggested that the term limit policy arose to address fears of continued granting of long term residency rights to non-Bermudians. 3 years into the policy, the Minister has garnered feedback from many and although controversial, aimed specifically to gain insight from Bermudians closest to the issue. Many raised questions of the policy, perceptions created and whether it represents Bermudian best interests. These discussions proved a valuable review of the policy's effectiveness and hopefully will catalyze larger discussions within the community.

According to the Minister, the sole purpose of the term limit policy is to reduce claims on permanent residency rights of non-Bermudians. According to the "Community for a New Millennium" white paper of 2001, Bermudians feared that continued granting of residency would impact Bermudian ability to own land, find good jobs, attain affordable housing, while risk damaging our culture and potentially incur negative social and economic costs.

3 years in, meetings like this are an opportunity to gain valuable feedback. To the Minister's credit despite the cosmopolitan makeup of the crowd no Bermudian stood to bear witness to difficulties seen in the granting of exemptions or extensions and most believed the Ministry had been cordial in working with business in its implementation. However, questions were raised about perceptions created by the policy and whether it adds value for Bermudians. Minister Burch fairly suggests his job is to implement policy, garner and provide feedback and that the decision of continuation ultimately rests with Bermudians.

While the means for garnering feedback may have been unsavory, is it valuable to gain insight from Bermudians most exposed to the workings of the policy? Are Bermudian views valued in establishing whether it addresses concerns initially raised by Bermudians? Further are opinions more likely to be heard and consumed by the larger community if they come from Bermudians?

Many spoke; more attended, applauded and agreed. Unwelcome perceptions are created among our guests and a misunderstanding of not only the value added by our guests but also how we discourage them from contributing further are concerns. Many wondered how reducing permanent residents benefits Bermudians vs. encouraging highly valued guests to contribute even more. Does maintaining a near endless state of limbo for our guests discourage them from investing in Bermuda? For every work permit job created, is it recognized how many Bermudian jobs are created and how much money is spent in Bermuda? Many were left wondering if this policy adequately meets the needs and concerns of Bermudians.

Concerns related to Bermudian wellbeing surprisingly did not revolve around those discovered in the 2001 but instead other issues. Companies being good corporate citizens, whether in undertaking practices of tailor making job adverts, attempts to disfavor adequately qualified Bermudians and creating disparities between income and benefits were concerns of note. The Minister countered that these occurrences are a minority and most are good corporate citizens. Still, is it concerning that the perception still exists? This paralleled concerns regarding whether Bermudians are doing enough to play our part in adequately eliminating unnecessary barriers to entry such as inadequate education. This including whether Bermudians adequately recognize that in the majority of cases hard work and commitment are recognized, appreciated and rewarded. Ultimately advancement of our industry requires a greater partnership between Bermudians and our guests to ensure that everyone wins.

Despite the controversy the meeting was widely seen as valuable, especially for the opportunity to gain insights from Bermudians closest to the policy. From reviews given it does not appear that the term limit policy is an effective solution to the concerns raised by those in attendance nor those of 2001. Thus whether reducing claims on long term residency is in the best interests of Bermudians is left in question given the downsides that accompany it. These discussions provided not only a valuable review on the policy's effectiveness but also raised questions of whether much larger discussions are needed. Discussions not only on the term limit policy but how Bermudians such as those in International Business can have a greater role in shaping the policy, implementation and development of our industry.

April 08, 2010

Bermudians In International Business

Those interested in knowing what happened at Minister Burch's meeting with Bermudians In International Business can check out the [21Square twitter feed](#) (on the right of this site) for notes I took during the meeting.

I'd like to extend my thanks to Minister Burch and his staff for hosting the meeting, it was very informative and I greatly appreciate his willingness to not only listen to and hear the views of Bermudians in International Business but also take notes and genuinely respond to every question and comment, sometimes even in a lighthearted and entertaining manner.

Personally I hope a number of things come from this meeting. One recommendation was extending the term limit to 10 or 15 years with perhaps an extension halved once that is up. I believe this would be a positive move. Another was to hold a similar meeting for non-Bermudians, I wholly believe that this would do a great deal to help improve perceptions among the expat community. I also believe it is worthwhile for Bermudians to deeply question our desire for no further long term residency grants given it's impact on the contributions of long standing key non-Bermudians.

Finally I hope that more meetings like this occur and that we'll see the rise of an association representing Bermudians In International Business as this style of gathering and voices of Bermudians working in the industry should have been formed long ago and has considerable value in helping our leadership understand how they can represent the interests of Bermudians in industry.

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Edit: I'd like to add that while I was not fond of the approach taken to the meeting regarding "Bermudians Only" and the requirement of wristbands I decided to reserve judgment until the end. My thoughts now are that despite this rather controversial means of going about things there was considerable value in having only Bermudians attend. Hopefully to quell the negative PR that has occurred Minister Burch will follow up with a similar meeting for non-Bermudians for I believe it would go a long way towards changing perceptions for the better.

April 05, 2010

Recovering our Bermuda

It is certainly not too late for us to recover our Bermuda, to take it back to the place it once was. The issue is that we need to act to change things and get back on course. We can no longer sit idly by as our island deteriorates any further as we are getting too close to losing our grip on the incredibly place that our island could be. We need to put aside our differences and work together to develop ideas and strategies that can hopefully put our island back on the right track.

While some may be wildly surprised by these recent acts of extreme violence, unfortunately this has been an expected turn of events for quite some time. It is a natural progression of the current state of our economy and social system, the product of having a large unskilled and poorly educated proportion of our workforce. With the

local recession, the erosion of jobs and the ever increasing divide between rich and poor it was simply a matter of time before things got worse and unfortunately still will.

In the heat of the moment we're left feeling like we need to react swiftly to these kinds of events by cracking down on offenders. We sometimes forget that this isn't a new issue and is one which has been brewing for quite some time. Cracking down and increased penalties can do much to make us feel like we're accomplishing great things but in the end we're simply putting a band aid over the problem when what we really need is to cure the infection. Quite simply in our present economic and social climate we are facing an abundance of new people willing to step up and get involved in this kind of crime, for each one we imprison another waits to step into his/her shoes. Thus would we gain more in the long run through a focus the bulk of our energies on coming up with proactive strategies that can address the root of our problems rather than reactive quick fixes?

A number of things have been presented lately as ideas worth trying and they are not only worth being rebroadcast here, but certainly anywhere and everywhere they can be heard.

- **Parish constables** - Bring back the concept of parish constables responsible for relations within a certain area or parish. Their duties would specifically include regularly patrolling the area on foot, going door to door for community presence and feedback as well as assisting in the creation and organization of neighbourhood watch groups and other means to promote increased community involvement in policing. The core task for each parish constable would be to work to develop a relationship with their community and act as a liaison between it and the greater police force.
- **Zero tolerance to crime from known gang associated individuals** - The Bermuda Sun [recently highlighted](#) efforts of Birmingham in the UK to tackle gang activity. Namely it involved a crack down on known offenders and gang activity by stepping up the pursuit of every possible offense by suspected gang individuals in order to get them off the streets and hammer into them that crime will not be tolerated. The article notes that the local police force is investigating this as a possible solution and hopefully they continue to do so and even get expedited support to follow through.
- **Ceasefire, getting early offenders back on the right path** - Proposed numerous times by the Royal Gazette, the [CeaseFire program](#) compiles cases against new offenders but puts them on hold based upon a community intervention and non-public probation as a means to put them on notice and hopefully encourage them to stay away from the path they're walking down. Government should assist the police force with any legislation and resources necessary to implement this program.
- **Attack gang profitability** - Very simply, guns aren't cheap. Many people have risen of late to suggest their belief that the drug trade fuels gang profitability and enables gangs to sustain themselves and afford these rather risky acts. As per various individuals calls we need an open, non-partisan and proper debate on our drug laws to determine if there is a means that we can take to reduce profitability through alternatives to the 'war on drugs'.
- **Promote positive role models** - Our single parent society has left many without positive role models and we've done little to attempt to boost the visibility of those worth modeling. We need to significantly step up visibility of positive role models and encourage their involvement in promoting that success is possible via traditional routes. We need to document and promote the stories of people that

have achieved success from the very same situations that face many of our youth. We need to put them everywhere we can that they'll reach an audience. On buses, bus shelters, park benches, grocery carts, grocery bags, milk cartons, elevators. Anywhere and everywhere that people may be that we can catch their attention we need to promote that it is possible to achieve success and even the first steps to take or who to call to get help.

- **Tackle the visible divide between the haves and the have-not's** - Everywhere you look the divide between the rich and the poor has grown larger and larger. We haven't helped things by allowing large fancy SUVs, hummers, BMWs, Mercedes and other means to flash wealth and accentuate the divide. Can we move to reduce these kinds of displays of extravagant wealth by repealing the larger cars acts and increasing taxes on luxury goods to reduce opulence?
- **Rising tide programs** - It is said that a rising tide lifts all boats. We too need a rising tide amongst our people. Too many people don't even have the very basic things you need to find a job such as a bank account, an id card, a phone, basic reading/writing skills. As much as we can talk about fixing education that is a long term solution. People who are poorly educated with limited options and a limited vision or comprehension of how to see their way out of poverty will choose the most viable option: crime and gangs. Can we institute "Rising tide" social programs that focuses on raising the skills of all people, starting with those at the bottom and the most basic of skills to survive?
- **Job stimulus** - The downturn in construction, tourism and even international business has eliminated jobs turning more towards crime and gangs. Can we institute programs to boost jobs such that people are less inclined to turn towards crime? Can we repeal tax hikes to boost job growth at a time when it's most needed and start looking at how we can reduce unnecessary spending (government car sharing for example).

Are there other things we can be doing? Of course. If you have ideas, share them, tell people, hopefully those with the ability to make a difference are listening because it is at this time that we need them to listen most. Let us hope that we have reached a turning point in the downfall of our society and that together all Bermudians, permanent residents and guest workers put aside any differences we may have to focus on turning Bermuda back into the incredible and safe place it is meant to be.

Posted by Denis on April 5, 2010 | [Permalink](#) | [Comments \(5\)](#)

